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FIRST UP

Local news, information, & analysis

Grant students will send letters to troops in Iraq

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A mother and daughter duo, Versell and Ardalia Washington, spoke to students at Dorothy Grant Elementary on Sept. 18 about sending items to U.S. troops overseas.

The two are sewing and stuffing almost 150 stockings and asked the students to take part in a letter writing campaign so the letters could be divided into the stockings and delivered to the troops by Christmas.

"I have a friend and both of her brothers are in Iraq, outside of Baghdad," Ardalia Washington said as she pointed to a large map that was held up for the students to see.

She showed pictures of the two brothers, Sgt. Gary Finney, and

1st Sgt. William Wofford, along with pictures of both of their troops. One troop has 42 soldiers, the other 117.

"We're going to send them stockings, and you guys are the only school, and lucky to be honored to have this opportunity," Ardalia Washington said.

Chris Ridge, the school's principal, informed the students about the importance of the day, Constitution Day, which was recognized by schools on Sept. 18 since the actual day fell on Sept. 17.

"The Constitution is our plan of government," Ridge said. "It outlines the freedom we have in the United States. That freedom comes at a cost and we are lucky to be here."

"We are so lucky, so blessed to be at a wonderful school. Today we can take time to think about our wonderful school ... and be

thankful and remember our freedoms."

As a way for students to show their gratitude, Ridge said: "You can take time to write a letter, and that letter will go halfway around the world."

Ridge said that this may be one of the first times some of his students have had the opportunity to write a letter such as this one.

"This is a real purpose for writing. When we talk about writing, we talk about authentic writing. It has a purpose, and to be able to write and express opinions - there's a real purpose there," he said.

Ridge also said he is aware some parents may feel strongly about the war, and offered alternatives to the letter writing campaign for the soldiers.

"Kids can write to anyone," he said. "They can write to a politi-



Dorothy Grant, joined by Ardalia and Versell Washington, held up one of the handmade stockings that will be sent to a soldier.



Principal Chris Ridge introduced Ardalia and Versell Washington and Dorothy Grant as Ardalia Washington showed students where their letters will be sent.

cian, the president, or even a principal."

Dorothy Grant, whom the school was named after, helped the Washington women involve the school with the care packages.

"I think it's great just to know we don't even know them personally and that we are still receptive to wanting to do stuff for our servicemen," she said.

Fifth grade teacher Angelica Luna said that her students were so eager to start with the letters that she gave them the go-ahead and they already completed them.

"It turned out that they were really compassionate about it, and

very enthusiastic," Luna said.

All of her 32 students participated, and she said some of the letters were bound to bring tears to their readers because they were emotional, touching, and sincere.

A large box is located in the school office for anyone wishing to contribute to the stockings. Needed are items such as mouthwash, razors, gloves, hard candy, nuts, magazines, tea bags, instant coffee, soap, cough drops, and vitamins.

Oct. 6 is the last day to donate items. For more information, call 357-5540.